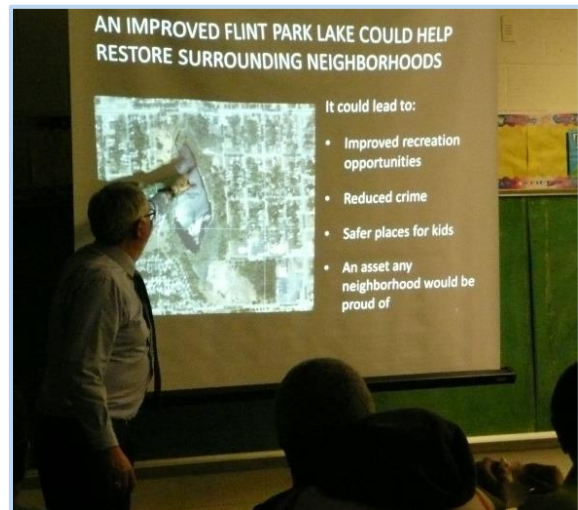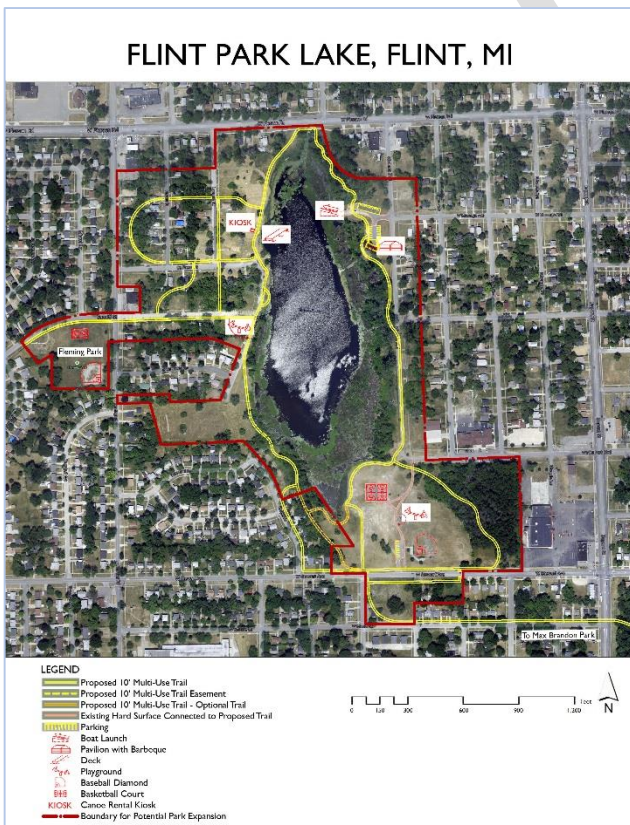# A Guidebook to Community Engagement:
Involving Urban and Low-Income Populations in an Environmental Planning Process

FLINT PARK LAKE, FLINT, MI

AN IMPROVED FLINT PARK LAKE COULD HELP RESTORE SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOODS

It could lead to:

- Improved recreation opportunities
- Reduced crime
- Safer places for kids
- An asset any neighborhood would be proud of

Source: MSU-PZC

A Guidebook to Community Engagement: Involving Urban and Low-Income Populations in an Environmental Planning Process

Prepared by:

Planning & Zoning Center at Michigan State University
Pardeep Toor
Jason Cox
Mark Wyckoff, FAICP

In partnership with:

Flint River Watershed Coalition
Rebecca Fedewa, Executive Director
Sondra Severn, Project Coordinator

September 2014

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

Inspiring and harnessing public input and opinions is a pivotal and prominent part of planning and community development. All such activities require building at least a modest relationship with individuals and stakeholder groups and depends upon a level of trust that may or may not be present at the start of the process. As a result, engaging residents and stakeholders in short- or long-term planning processes is an often arduous activity that requires concentrated and sustained commitment from both planning practitioners and community members. This is challenging when there is plenty of time, but especially so with time-limited opportunities. If there is no relationship between the community and those presenting the opportunity, then building a relationship and trust must occur quickly. This guidebook explores some of the challenges associated with creating a relationship and building trust in two low-income minority neighborhoods in Flint, MI around water quality issues within a short period of time.

This document presents: 1) community engagement principles; 2) specific challenges related to engaging low-income urban residents around issues of water quality around two lakes in Flint; and 3) a step-by-step planning process for use in future engagement efforts in urban communities.

Background on Community Engagement

Community engagement is a concerted values-based tool in planning that addresses core concerns of residents and stakeholders in a targeted community. Success requires an inclusive process that identifies issues and challenges with the aim of reaching consensus on how to address and remediate concerns. If participation levels are low, then at a minimum the process needs to be representative of the targeted community.

Public participation is a two-way engagement tool between policymakers and stakeholders that helps develop innovative and creative ideas. The outcomes of effective community engagement include enhanced communication and cooperation and shared responsibility to implement a common vision between policymakers and stakeholders. Effective engagement helps hold the policymakers accountable and ensures that resulting policies and plans truly reflect the vision and desires of the community.

Impoverished or minority populations are often under-served in community development decisions. Recruitment may involve incentives and clear expression of benefits. Bottom-up engagement ensures diversity across the spectrum of race, religion, gender, and socioeconomic status. Only by engaging with at least a representative sample of the population can a collective view of the community be established and decisions be jointly made for the greater good of all residents and stakeholders.

> *The population of the neighborhoods in the study area were pre-dominantly African-American. The Flint Park Lake community has 8,114 persons, with 94.2 percent African American. The population of the three neighborhoods around Thread Lake is 5,265 persons and is 64.7 percent African American.*
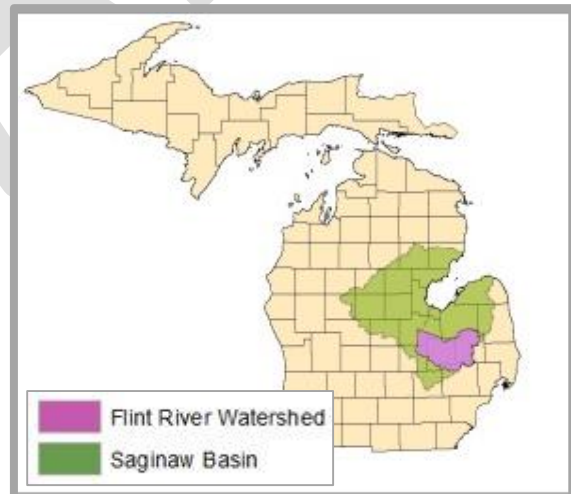>
> *Source: US Census 2010*

Engaging minority and traditionally under-served populations needs to be a purposeful and focused effort. The engaged populations need to be informed and then taught about how their participation affects the decision-making process. Involvement in the decision-making process is a public right and should be exercised to influence and promote sustainable decisions that acknowledge the needs and interests of everyone in the community.

The need for community engagement is heightened around environmental issues, such as water quality protection, where a collection of short-term decisions and actions have long-lasting, often irreversible impacts on the environment and surrounding communities.

Effective engagement is crucial to expand the community's capacity to focus on long-term environmental implications, to inform stakeholders about necessary present-day behavioral changes needed to support sustainability, and to explore possible scenarios depending on the degree of action that is taken. The engagement process must be a collective community effort in order to ensure equal understanding of the issues and shared responsibility with regard to planning for change and acting to implement.

With assistance from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and in partnership with the Flint River Watershed Coalition (FRWC), the Planning and Zoning Center (PZC, a part of the Land Policy Institute (LPI) at Michigan State University) engaged local residents around Thread Lake and Flint Park Lake in order to produce a vision for both communities centered on their keystone assets. The project focused on the study area of the Flint River Watershed, which lies within the southern portion of the Saginaw Bay Watershed (*Figure 1*). The communities surrounding both lakes are largely under-served, low-income minority populations. During the visioning process, the project team engaged residents and stakeholders in both communities in

Figure 1: The Flint River Watershed served as the project's focus area for community engagement in water quality issues.

Source: MSU-PZC

a variety of different ways. This Guidebook includes a collection of strategies that were employed in the Flint communities and the corresponding principles that resulted, and may be applicable to communities with similar demographics and water quality issues.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES, TECHNIQUES, AND PRACTICE

Community engagement in under-served urban populations is more than simply a democratic exercise, it is a matter of social equity. It's an effort to ensure equitable input on distribution of public services and fair implementation of public policies across populations. Under-represented populations include but are not limited to the following: elderly, impoverished, youth, disabled/handicapped, Native Americans and other minority populations, displaced individuals, single-parent households, or immigrants.

Engagement must be a meaningful two-way conversation that accounts for a community's individual and collective history, perceptions, opinions, and successes and failures. The three underlying principles of community engagement are: 1) Relationships; 2) Trust; and 3) Partnerships *(Figure 2).*
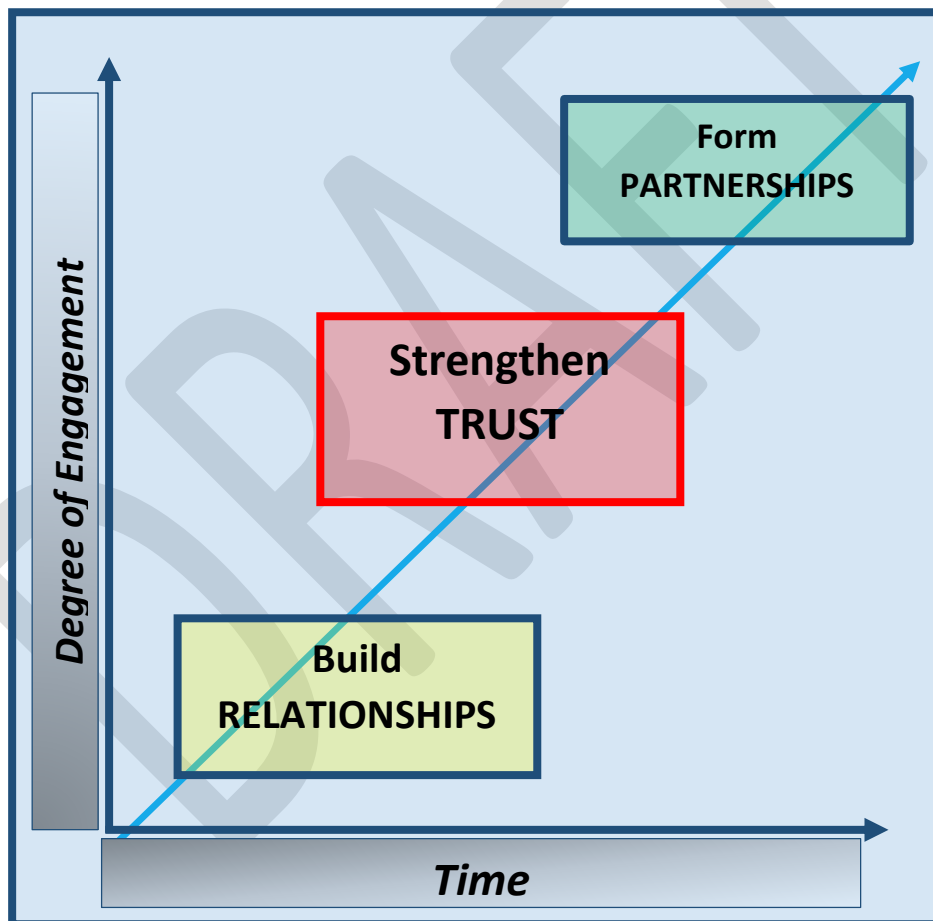
Figure 2: Necessary elements to achieving a shared vision through community engagement.

Source: MSU-PZC

Building relationships is the first step in the engagement process, and over time it leads to strengthening trust with citizens and stakeholders. The resulting relationships can lead to informal and formal networks from related and unrelated parties which over time can cement themselves as partnerships. Partnering with individuals and organizations is the highest degree of community engagement and requires the greatest investment in time.

It is best to start with smaller projects and goals in order to begin the relationship building process. Smaller projects will provide an overview of the engagement process on a shorter time frame. These projects also offer the opportunity have short-term successes and celebrations which will again strengthen trust and establish a foundation for a relationship for the longer-term engagement project.

Overall, the degree and depth of community engagement increases with an increased investment of time. The more meaningful engagement events and meetings that take place, the greater the probability of meaningful conversation and partnerships that lead to exemplary results. Below is a deeper examination of the importance of these sequential core concepts.

> *Build Relationships* – Constructing relationships is the first essential principle in the community engagement process. The opportunity for a relationship begins with a common interest, a shared goal, a desire to take action regarding an issue or subject matter, and a willingness to collaborate with others. Once these parameters are established, there exists an opportunity for a professional relationship that begins with modest presumptions that are an elementary form of trust. This can evolve into a partnership in time by strengthening trust.

> *Strengthen Trust* – Trust between the research team, partner organizations, and stakeholders is the most important factor for successful engagement and is the result of a mutually supportive relationship. Trust can be strengthened by investing time in the community, dedicating intellectual resources to the study area, and contributing to existing efforts. By building relationships with existing local organizations, the research team can expedite the "strengthening trust" phase by obtaining endorsements from local leaders and authorities who have already achieved partnerships with other stakeholders and residents. Working with existing local leaders is crucial if the time available is limited, because effectively, the research team is trading off the trust the local leaders already have in the community. Combining efforts with established local organizations gives priority and precedence to the research team's voice as it aims to earn the trust of residents and then engage them in a concerted effort to assist the community.

> *Form Partnerships* – Partnerships are long-term relationships that go beyond the stated timeframe of a specific project or study area. Partnerships are mutually beneficial to both organizations and are sustained through multiple projects that may or may not be related. True partnerships are built out of mutual respect between two organizations or

individuals and allows for collaboration where the contributions of organizations are equally valued and incorporated. For community engagement, direct partnerships with residents and stakeholders is the optimal goal as it ensures that citizens contribute to and drive the efforts that construct the future of their neighborhoods and community.

A byproduct of these three guiding principles is the chance to network with known and, when you start, unknown organizations that will potentially create more opportunities for stakeholders and the research team. As the team builds trust with the community, new opportunities for community involvement and collaboration with entities not in the current study area or those working on different projects may reveal themselves. Inversely, stakeholders and residents will also be exposed to different networks both inside and outside of their community which will enhance their opportunities to improve and invest in their community.

Building partnerships in this way establishes the foundation for a successful engagement process and empowers participants to apply what they've learned themselves. Many positive outcomes stem from effective partnerships, both for the parties directly involved as well as the surrounding community. However, barriers to building effective partnerships also exist that can create tensions in the early stages of developing these relationships. These barriers should be recognized at the onset of the engagement process and planned for whenever possible, as many of them are easily combatted with the proper communication and education. The box to the right further details the positive aspects of partnerships, along with the potential barriers that may arise when attempting to build these integral bonds.

Positive Aspects of Partnerships

- *Opens lines of communication*
- *Interconnectedness leads to shared knowledge, resources, access to others*
- *Enhances complementary characteristics and resources*
- *Pooling of resources helps increase reach*
- *Permits collaboration towards common goals*
- *Identifies the doers and active community members eager to make an impact*
- *Further solidifies trust and interconnectedness within community*

Barriers to Effective Partnerships

- *Mistrust in early stages*
- *Past relationships and personalities that harbor grudges/bad blood; past transgressions*
- *Lack of openness or willingness to listen to and acknowledge ideas of others*
- *Competing for limited resources*
- *Lack of transparency in identifying who has the power, who makes final decisions*
- *Creating equal participation and standing amongst all parties within partnership*
- *Cultural differences that lead to confusion or differing expectations*
- *Different levels of bureaucracy (e.g. state vs. local) to navigate*
- *Establishing and maintaining credibility and consistency*

Elements and Techniques of Community Engagement

Community engagement is a transparent planning process that is often described and practiced along a spectrum of public participation. The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) is a worldwide advocate for the positive impacts of public participation, and provides services and resources for governments, institutions, and community organizations to maximize their community engagement efforts. The Core Values as described by the organization are universal in their application, and focus on the belief that public participation:

- Provides those who are affected by a decision the right to be involved in the decision-making process;
- Promises that the public's contribution will be accounted for and have an influence on the decision;
- Promotes sustainable decisions by raising awareness of the needs and interests of all participants;
- Facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by the decision;
- Seeks input from participants in designing how they participate;
- Provides participants with the information needed to participate in a meaningful way; and
- Communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

These values illustrate the basic tenets that must be recognized and followed from the outset of any successful community engagement initiative. To further elaborate on this process, the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation (*Figure 3*) was created to provide a breakdown of the various components involved in achieving the desired level of public participation during community engagement (*IAP2.org*).

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

Increasing Level of Public Impact →

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Example techniques	▪ Fact sheets ▪ Web sites ▪ Open houses	▪ Public comment ▪ Focus groups ▪ Surveys ▪ Public meetings	▪ Workshops ▪ Deliberative polling	▪ Citizen advisory committees ▪ Consensus-building ▪ Participatory decision-making	▪ Citizen juries ▪ Ballots ▪ Delegated decision

Figure 3: The International Association for Public Participation spectrum outlines a continuum of public participation to aid in community engagement efforts.

Source: International Association for Public Participation

The Spectrum illustrates how public impact increases with the progression through the inform stage to the consult, involve, collaborate, and empower stages. The spectrum begins with educating the population on an issue and then ultimately providing them with the tools, techniques, and data to make an informed decision that has the greatest benefit in their community. The result of community engagement may not necessarily be to help the community make a decision, but to guide residents and stakeholders through a process that allows them to make the best decision for themselves. At the onset of the spectrum, a crucial first step is acquiring knowledge about the community before attempting to

At Thread Lake, the project team held an Ice Cream Social to meet residents and stakeholders, informally introduce the project on an individual basis, and learn more about the community. Community members were engaged via a passive mapping activity in which they identified where they lived and specific characteristics about their neighborhood.

engage them in planning efforts. No two communities are the same. Each possesses unique experiences and relationships based on their individual histories. As facilitators of community engagement, researchers should be aware of the community's history and past struggles before considering the engagement process. It is also equally crucial for the facilitators to learn from the community before beginning the engagement process.

Learning from the community requires the formation of individual relationships. These individual relationships are the first step in enhancing and increasing community engagement. This process of increasing community engagement via relationships can also be described as *Bonding*, *Bridging,* and *Linking (Figure 4).*

Bonding, bridging, and linking are a spectrum of expansive engagement strategies that evolve from building relationships with interested individuals to expanding those relationships into partnerships with similar and dissimilar organizations. These steps are vital in creating a community-wide collaborative framework.

> *Bonding* – Recruits like-minded community members through individual relationships. Examples of bonding include individual visits to homes, offices, churches, one-on-one meetings, or lunch or dinner meetings.

> *Bridging* – Promotes community engagement through building relationships with community-based organizations. This level of engagement involves organizations that have similar goals but are working in different arenas. An example of bridging is the common goal of preserving the environment – one organization may approach this cause by attempting to improve surface water quality while another might focus on renewing forest lands.

> *Linking* – Supports community engagement by connecting organizations and coalitions with power and resources to others with less power and resources. Linking is the highest level of community engagement because it involves collaboration between

unlike organizations with dissimilar services and goals. An example of linking is facilitating conversations between an environmental group and an organization assisting non-English speakers who may not traditionally be involved in those issues. The mission of the two organizations are distinct but they can work together for the purposes of engagement.
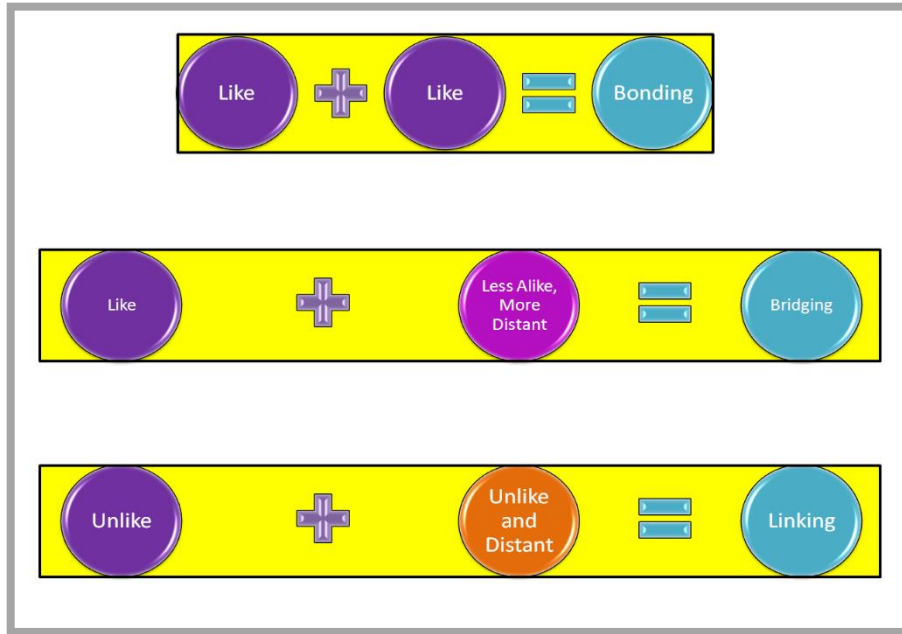
Figure 4: Bonding, Bridging, and Linking are key tenets of community engagement.

Source: Washtenaw County Public Health.

The foundation of bonding, bridging, and linking is relationships with individuals. These individual relationships lead to partnerships between like and unlike organizations and serve to expand the engagement network in the community.

Special Challenges in Under-Represented Communities

The core principles of community engagement are applicable everywhere, but the challenges and barriers to meaningful engagement are heightened (due to specific conditions) in traditionally under-represented communities (like those with large minority populations). Challenges and barriers to public participation that are unique to under-represented communities include:

- *Logistics* (scheduling venues, times, days)
- *Economics* (transportation, day care, incentives)
- *Communication* (familiarity with topic or processes, non-English speakers)
- *Organization* (identifying appropriate stakeholders and networks).

These are all barriers that need to be identified and overcome through forethought and planning and must be based on a comprehensive understanding of the community. Techniques to overcome these barriers are discussed in the *Planning for Urban Engagement* section on page 32. This section focuses on detailing these specific barriers.

Logistics: Scheduling the date, time, and location of meetings can be a critical barrier to community engagement. Community members are unlikely to attend meeting times that conflict with their existing work, home, religious, or extracurricular schedules. The date of the community engagement effort must be selected carefully so not to conflict with local sporting events, municipal meetings, or other large gatherings in the area. The time must not conflict with other commitments, specifically traditional work hours. The selected time must also be congruent with traditional meal times for parents and adults to ensure minimal interference. If a meeting is scheduled during a meal time, it is the responsibility of the community engagement facilitator or research team to provide an appropriate healthy meal for residents. The location of the engagement event should be familiar, be accessible by multiple modes of transportation, and in the neighborhood or region where the project is taking place.

> *Dinner was advertised and served in all the engagement sessions in both Thread and Flint Park Lake.*

> *In both Thread and Flint Park Lake, all engagement sessions were held in the evening after traditional work hours. Children were encouraged to attend all engagement sessions, and specific activities were organized for them while parents/ caregivers participated in the event.*

Economics: Community members are unlikely to attend engagement sessions if there is a negative economic consequence to them from doing so. Economic consequences can involve the cost of travel if the sessions are scheduled outside of their immediate vicinity, or there are day care costs associated with attending. In some cases, it might be necessary to provide reimbursement for transportation or organize shuttles to encourage attendance at the events. Offering a financial incentive to attend the engagement session should also be considered if it increases participation.

Communication: Communication barriers span the largest degree of challenges as they include both technical concerns related to the topic and marketing to recruit residents and stakeholders to attend the event. Prior to the engagement event, appropriate communication is necessary to market and recruit individuals to attend. Residents and stakeholders should be targeted individually and as a group within their member organizations. A variety of marketing methodologies across multiple mediums (digital, paper, mail) should be

> *A multitude of marketing efforts were pursued to recruit residents to engagement sessions in Thread and Flint Park Lake including: emailing listservs of local neighborhood organizations, partners and non-profits; door-to-door flyer distribution; website and newsletter announcements; reminders on social media; personal phone calls to residents; mailings to individual homes (Figure 5).*

considered and deployed in order to overcome this barrier. Planning and environmental restoration language can be new, challenging, and intimidating to event participants. Acronyms should be used minimally and handouts should be provided at the event to complement the presentation and engagement efforts. Graphics and photos should be used for core concepts, as excessive verbiage could be cumbersome depending on the literacy levels of the target population. All exercises must be explained clearly and in some cases completed collectively as a group. Exercises should vary to include oral and written communication in order to accommodate participants that have different comfort levels with each medium. Lastly, community engagement efforts should be sensitive to the needs of non-English speaking populations who may want to participate despite the language barrier. Accommodations such as interpreters for non-English speakers should be considered and provided at all community engagement events to ensure maximum participation.

Figure 5: Invitations and reminders for community gatherings were distributed by the project team through various avenues.

Source: MSU-PZC

Organization: Identifying influential community leaders, organizations, and residents is a challenge and sometimes a barrier to maximizing engagement efforts in a community. These individuals and groups are key access points to the greater community. Effective relationships with these community members are crucial to the success of the entire engagement process. Communications with leading individuals and organizations should be open, honest, and transparent, and where feasible should occur before the larger engagement process. It is also important to be aware of potential conflicts between organizations in the study area. Competing organizations may harvest deep-seated tensions which further emphasizes the importance of identifying all keystone organizations and residents so not to show favoritism towards one or the other.

Challenges Related to Water Quality Issues

The long-term nature of environmental issues could be another barrier encountered during a project and its engagement efforts. The daily stresses and challenges in under-represented communities are immediate and short-term, whereas the scale for environmental restoration and water quality improvement with regard to the project are long-term. In terms of improving water quality, efforts made in the present will result in improvement in the decades ahead. Water quality improvement is a tertiary challenge in distressed communities compared to more immediate concerns like putting food on the table and putting a roof over your head. Creative and unique strategies need to be employed in order to invest residents and stakeholders in water quality.

The scientific language related to water quality is another engagement barrier. Water quality measurements and designations are often confusing and need to be explained in a manner that is comprehensible to the public. Data must be clearly presented with appropriate estimates of the timeline and investments required to improve water quality. The research team must get to the point quickly of how the information

In both Thread and Flint Park Lake, water quality improvements were tied to recreational opportunities and neighborhood stabilization and redevelopment. An increase in short-term recreational opportunities was utilized to invest the communities in larger and more long-term water quality issues (Figure 6).

matters to stakeholders and address why stakeholders should care. The team should be prepared to take smaller bites at once and overtly "connect the dots." Don't leave apparent conclusions to happy accidents or assume "ah-ha" comes at the same time for everyone.
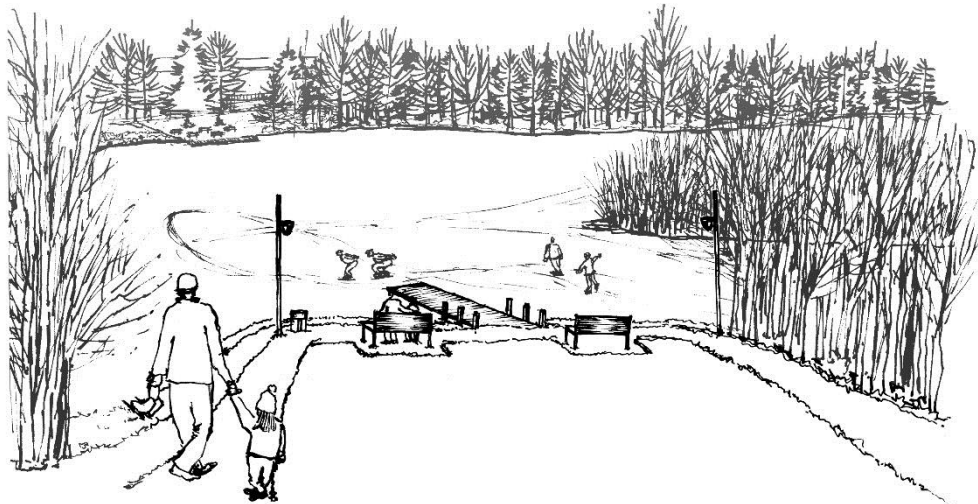
Figure 6: Visioning sessions asked residents to focus on the recreational possibilities for their lake as a means to start the conversation on water quality.

Source: MSU-PZC

APPLICATION OF ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES TO TWO MINORITY COMMUNITIES

Flint, Michigan is unique in that it is a large (but shrinking) city of 102,434 (formerly was 196,940 in 1960) that features three distinct lakes within its city limits – Thread Lake, Flint Park Lake, and Kearsley Reservoir. Currently, these water bodies *(Figure 7)* are underutilized assets in the community as years of neglect have resulted in concerns about water quality, safety, and widespread blight or abandoned land nearby.
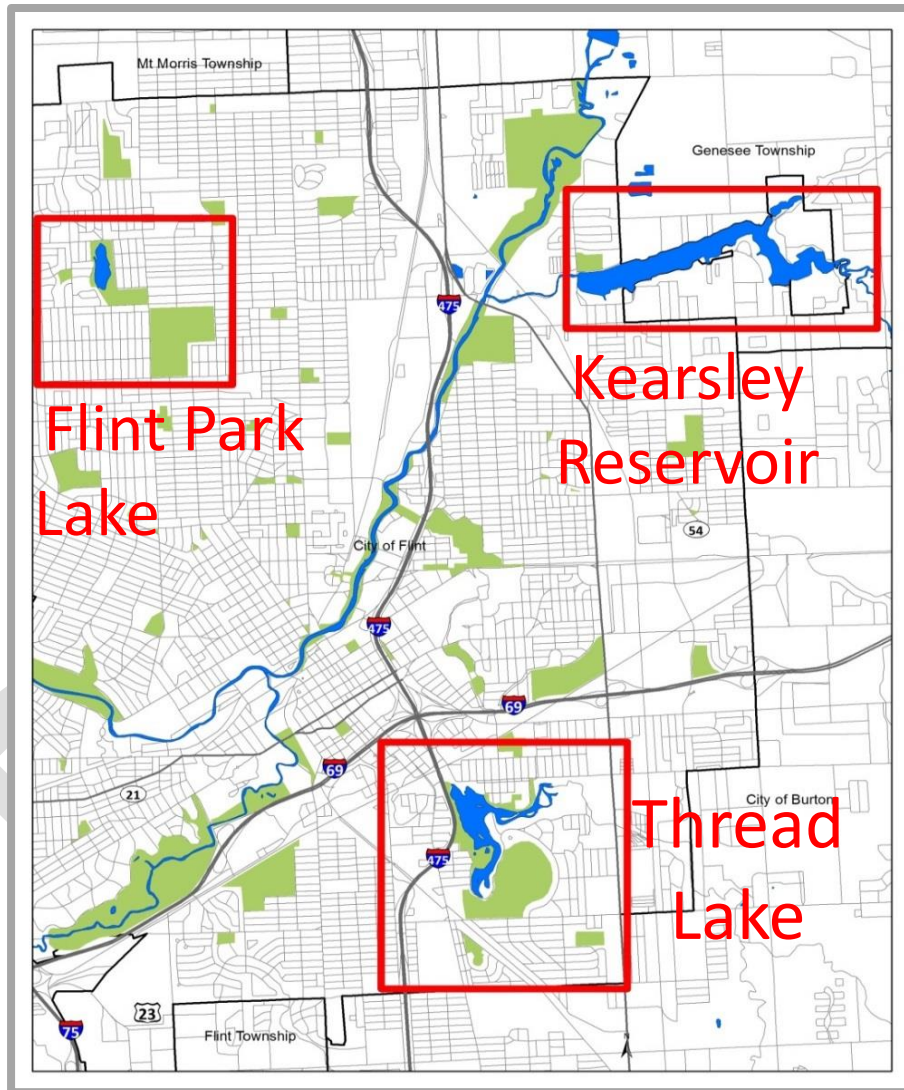
Figure 7: Multiple lakes resides within City of Flint boundaries.

Source: MSU-PZC

Blight and vacant lots dominate the landscape on land adjacent to parts of Thread and Flint Park Lake. Neighborhood recovery wanes in the face of political, fiscal, and economic uncertainty in the city. The project team employed a multitude of community engagement

techniques to learn the history of the neighborhoods in the study area and explored creative solutions to current challenges in partnership with residents and stakeholders surrounding the two lakes. Following is a summary of the project team's community engagement process in communities surrounding both Thread Lake and Flint Park Lake.

Thread Lake Engagement Overview

Thread Lake is located just southeast of downtown Flint and is surrounded by neighborhoods filled with active residents and local stakeholders eager to revitalize their community *(Photo 1)*. The project team (comprised of PZC and FRWC) engaged in a mini-planning process with the Thread Lake community to envision ways to use this unique natural amenity as a means to improve the safety, aesthetics, and quality of life within their neighborhoods.

Photo 1: Thread Lake is a unique natural resource that lies just southeast of downtown Flint.

Source: MSU-PZC

Background Research

During the initial stages of the project, the project team first conducted background research to gain a better understanding of the study area features and context, both its historical trends and past efforts as well as the current dynamics in play within the community. Census data was utilized to examine demographic trends such as age distribution, racial composition, and educational attainment. Archived and current news articles, miscellaneous web postings, and online community forums were reviewed to gain understanding of major

headlines, key concerns, and recurring issues related to the study area. Existing environmental reports conducted by state and federal institutions such as the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) were also analyzed by the project team to assess existing data pertaining to water quality, native vegetation, aquatic wildlife, and related ecological information. Similarly, any relevant planning documents pertaining to Thread Lake and its surrounding neighborhoods were also gathered, documented, and reviewed. These documents included:

- Imagine Flint Master Plan (newly adopted) *(Figure 8)*;
- City of Flint Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2007);
- Genesee County Five Years Parks and Recreation Plan (2009-2013);
- Southside Neighborhood Plan (2011);
- South Saginaw Task Force Project Report (2013); and
- Flint Riverfront Restoration Plan (2010).

These reports and documents provided vital insight into past and recent efforts in planning, engagement, and public participation. The levels of success and failure achieved and the lessons learned during previous processes were important takeaways to build upon and incorporate into the project work plan. This portion of the research also greatly assisted the project team in the significant task of properly assessing the existing natural resources and other community assets within the study area.

Figure 8: The newly-adopted Imagine Flint Master Plan provided crucial insight into the results of recent public participation and community engagement efforts. The input found in such documents must be taken into account by the incoming research team and built upon in their future initiatives.

Source: City of Flint. Imagine Flint

Thread Lake itself provides a unique water-based amenity within an urban setting, yet the area around it also offers many other assets to recognize and build upon. To fully catalogue these assets, the project team utilized the aforementioned reference documents, while also employing the use of Google maps for aerial and street level views of the lake, as well as photos and observations taken during on-site fieldwork and interviews. These inventory methods allowed the team to better document surrounding assets such as severely underutilized and poorly maintained public parks, playground and sports

facilities, fishing piers, and kayak and canoe launches; as well as neighborhood connections and bike routes, natural features such as vegetation, river and stream networks, and habitat biodiversity.

Pre-Event Planning

As was mentioned, one way to break down barriers is to bond, bridge, and link with influential community leaders. This helps develop trust and build relationships that will be needed to bolster participation and input and help with implementation efforts.

While gathering research and data, the project team set about forming initial connections with specific community leaders and key figures related to the study area. These persons were identified by a lot of calls to many city agencies, and neighborhood institutions like churches, schools, longtime businesses, etc. These community leaders were targeted for more direct communication and exchange of information. Some of the key ones included:

- Local officials such as elected officials and planning commissioners for the two wards within the study area;
- Local pastors and heads of neighborhood or block organizations; and
- Representatives from nearby academic/educational institutions and local businesses.

The project team scheduled meetings with these individuals to gain a more detailed, intimate insight into the ongoing concerns and future desires of the community by hearing from trusted, respected voices who could report on the pulse of people in the neighborhoods surrounding Thread Lake.

Expanding upon this strategy, the project team also attended relevant local meetings and community events occurring at the time. The City of Flint was then in the midst of concluding the community input phase of its master planning process. By participating in this process and attending sub-area workshops in the South Saginaw corridor, the project team had a chance to get acquainted first hand with current planning initiatives and the relevant stakeholders and local entities involved. These interactions with city planning staff, consultants, business owners, and local residents helped strengthen the early stages of building relationships and ensuing trust amongst the many stakeholders of the local planning process.

PZC and FRWC also attended and hosted a booth at the annual Southside Neighborhood Picnic at the Brennan Community Center, where the team distributed reference materials about the project as well as invitations to a community engagement ice cream social the team hosted in McKinley Park. The project team also offered a unique 'minnow race' game that attracted youth and their parents to the booth to learn more about the upcoming Thread Lake project *(Photo 2).* With the timing of the picnic occurring just weeks before the start of the school year, the team also brought MSU-themed pencils and folders to distribute to students.

Photo 2: Unique games such as this minnow race help engage youth and attract more family participation in community engagement efforts.

Source: MSU-PZC

This opportunity to establish a presence and make acquaintances on the neighborhood level helped to raise awareness and curiosity about the upcoming visioning sessions, while also forming a level of validation and familiarity between the project team and the community.

Following these initial steps in the engagement process, the team identified the key local stakeholders who would serve as primary community liaisons to help communicate the project goals and activities to local residents. With the team limited in its ability to be on-site and present within the project study area 24-7 (due to being housed in East Lansing at Michigan State University, 50 miles away), these key contacts were essential in establishing a solid rapport with the community. They also ensured a trusted, consistent line of communication was always present between the project team and local residents.

In the Thread Lake study area, multiple neighborhood organizations existed that have been involved in community programming and engagement for years. The presidents or authority figures within these organizations played a vital role in serving as project partners and community liaisons. Similarly, representatives of the International Academy of Flint, a prominent charter school within the study area, provided a wealth of outreach resources that included distributing flyers to students to take home to their parents/guardians, along with serving as the site for two community meetings during the project. These key stakeholders also were instrumental in communicating project updates and events to local businesses and residents, spreading the word through door-to-door distribution of invite cards, word-of-mouth communication, announcements in their organizational newsletters, bulletins, websites, and email listservs, as well as a featured spot on a local public radio show announcing key project dates. In essence, they became local ambassadors of the project.

Community Gathering- Ice Cream Social

Another key step leading up to the actual community visioning session was hosting an informal neighborhood ice cream social at the Vista Center in McKinley Park. The two-hour event was hosted by the project team on a Saturday afternoon, and offered games and refreshments for neighborhood residents around Thread Lake. Holding the event at this facility, which is located directly along the western shore of the lake, was designed in part to help get the conversation started amongst those in attendance as to the possibilities of this valued

natural resource. By viewing the lake and surrounding green space together as a group, the project team and participating residents were able to more readily discuss the current issues and future possibilities of Thread Lake. On-site children's activities such as a moon bounce house, coloring and drawing tables, and a full ice cream sundae bar also provided entertainment that encouraged entire families to attend. It was at this event where the team seriously engaged with the general public, formally introducing themselves while making local residents and stakeholders more familiar with the project background and mission. Simple map exercises with colored dot stickers were employed for residents to identify where they live, where they saw opportunities for recreation around the lake, and where they have faced the most issues with safety and park connectivity *(Photo 3, 4).*

Photo 3 and 4: The project team met with individuals at an Ice Cream Social in Thread Lake as a prelude to community visioning. This event was also an opportunity to learn more about the community directly from residents and stakeholders.

Source: MSU-PZC

The project team also asked participants to complete a two-page survey at the end of the event where they further elaborated upon concerns, hopes, and desires for possible ways to restore Thread Lake as a keystone community asset. This is an effective technique to capture thoughts from those who may not have been comfortable sharing in other ways during the session. The community dialogues, personal discussions, and data collected from the surveys and map exercises provided a significant amount of foundational community input to guide the design and content of the official visioning session planned for the following month.

Visioning Session

After months of background data collection, attending community meetings, conducting individual stakeholder interviews, and hosting the ice cream social, the project team held its first formal visioning session at the International Academy of Flint on October 8, 2013. The primary goal of this community event was brainstorming specific short- and long-term desired outcomes, strategies, and improvements the public envisioned for the lake and surrounding

neighborhoods. After a brief presentation detailing the meeting agenda and purpose, survey results from the ice cream social were then shared with the audience to give them an idea of the recurring themes and suggestions that were expressed by their fellow neighbors. The audience was then broken into tables of 8-10 people with one member of the project team at each table serving as a facilitator *(Photo 5).*

Residents were asked to imagine the lake and surrounding land ten years into the future and how they would like it to look and function. Questions were designed to get the audience thinking about the types of land uses, recreational amenities, and natural settings they envision for the lake. Discussions also turned towards asking who should be responsible for making these ideas happen, and which parties would be involved in their care and maintenance.

Photo 5: Small groups of local residents discuss their visions for revitalizing Thread Lake and the surrounding neighborhoods while facilitators from the project team record their ideas.

Source: MSU-PZC

Facilitators at each table recorded all comments and suggestions onto large white boards, where participants then indicated their three favorite ideas with dot stickers. The most supported ideas were then reported out at each table for everyone to hear. In these instances, having a local resident take on the role of reporting on behalf of the table provides more chances for integrative learning and communication. It is also important for all groups to hear all ideas so they can be acknowledged and then either confirmed, questioned, or discredited. At the conclusion of the visioning session, the project team indicated how they would take all the valuable input gathered at the event to help craft a draft vision document for Thread Lake and the surrounding neighborhoods. This document would serve as a tool for the community to use and refer to in future planning discussions.

Post-Engagement Procedures

Upon completion of the first draft of the Thread Lake Vision document, the project team corresponded with the City of Flint planning department to obtain input and further edits that helped ensure the document was in alignment with the initiatives of the recently adopted master plan. While applying these edits, a follow-up community meeting was scheduled at the International Academy on February 20, 2014 to share the latest draft of the vision document

with the public for its validation and to allow them a chance to share any further thoughts or concerns on the project. Pizza was served with fruit and vegetable trays while the public listened to the project team's presentation of the vision document and samples of the images and concepts found within (*Photo 6*).

Photo 6: A light dinner was served to local residents as they heard a presentation of the vision document by the project team.

Source: MSU-PZC

The vision is comprised of thirty-three goals that are prioritized chronologically and separated into the three target categories of Recreation, Neighborhood Stabilization & Targeted Redevelopment, and Water Quality. Entities with the ability to implement individual actions are identified. Audience members were given a survey chart that listed these goals and related action steps for implementation, and as the project team went through them the public marked their level of agreement with each of the suggested actions. This gave residents a chance to fully grasp each proposed vision goal and objective, ask any lingering questions, or add further suggestions to amend an action step. The dialogues that occurred throughout the vision presentation were recorded by the team taking notes, and these along with the tabulated results of the survey chart were then used to make further edits and refinements to the vision document.

The finalized vision document that incorporated the additional input from local residents and stakeholders was then posted on the project team's websites, distributed to key community liaisons that helped with the project, and sent to the City of Flint planning department to have as a reference tool in their future decisions for the Thread Lake study area. It is now being used by the Flint River Watershed Coalition to guide implementation of improvements around Thread Lake along with other engagement efforts.

The final document can be viewed or downloaded at:
http://www.landpolicy.msu.edu/modules.php?name=Documents&op=viewlive&sp_id=2556

Flint Park Lake Engagement Overview

Flint Park Lake is in the northwest portion of the City of Flint and is surrounded by long-tenured residents who have witnessed a sharp decline in the number of dwelling units and quality of housing in neighborhoods around the lake *(Photo 7).* While Thread Lake and Flint Park Lake each featured their own unique social, historical, and geographic context, similar engagement plans were applied to the Flint Park Lake study area that were utilized around Thread Lake, modified slightly to fit the targeted community. These strategies align with the principles of forming relationships, building trust, and evolving into partnerships over time that work together towards community growth and development.

Photo 7: Flint Park Lake is nestled within neighborhoods located a couple of miles northwest of downtown.

Source: MSU-PZC

Background Research

PZC staff employed similar research methods and resources to learn about the physical and historical backdrop of Flint Park Lake, the demographic composition of the surrounding area, and any previous or existing planning efforts in the area. Water quality data was similarly obtained through existing DNR and EPA reports that detailed water quality levels and biodiversity in the lake and connecting streams. For this study area, another planning document created for a prior planning project proved a valuable resource as well: The Flint Park Lake Citizens District Council (CDC) Redevelopment Plan was drafted in 2002 by Rowe Incorporated and Environmental Consulting and Technology. It was done as part of a grant-funded project to examine flooding, stormwater, and recreation improvements around the lake. While the data collected was over a decade old, the report included information on lake depths, muck levels,

drainage points, and flooding patterns that were very helpful in providing a portrait of the trends with this natural public water feature (*Figure 9*).

The CDC Redevelopment Plan also gave insight into the goals and desires expressed in previous community engagement efforts in the area along with recurring issues and concerns that came to the surface. Entering the project with as much knowledge as possible of such prior efforts was essential in establishing a strong connection and starting point for building relationships within the community. Existing assets around the lake and current conditions of park facilities (very poor) were also assessed by the project team to better understand recreational opportunities and key areas for improvement around the lake.
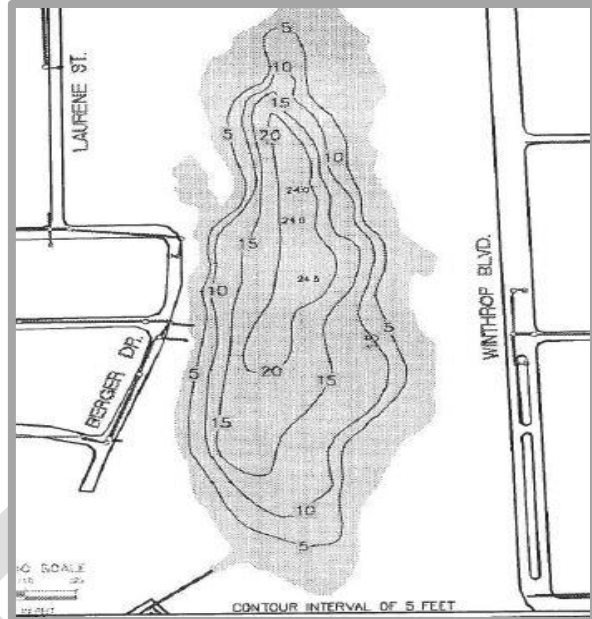

Figure 9: The CDC Redevelopment Plan included helpful scientific data that detailed lake contours and average depths.

Source: Environmental Consulting & Technology

Pre-Event Planning

Flint's master planning process again offered opportunities for the project team to attend sub-area workshops and community meetings in the Flint Park Lake study area. The Pierson Road corridor was designated as a sub-area in the new master plan and lies on the north side of the lake. These meetings helped the project team become more familiar with area residents and stakeholders as well as the local planning staff. A group of key figures in the community were then targeted by the team for individual visits with the hopes of establishing direct community liaisons for this study area much like was created around Thread Lake. The project team arranged an agenda and scheduled interviews with:

- Local elected officials such as the city councilperson for the ward;
- Other local officials such as the planning commissioner who resides in the area;
- Representatives of key community institutions Northridge Academy and the New McCree Theatre;
- Community pastors and local business owners; and
- Engaged residents who have lived in the area their entire lives.

These contacts not only provided more experiential local knowledge on the past issues and present concerns of the study area, but served as key contacts that helped facilitate communication and raise awareness of project dates and goals with fellow residents. While Thread Lake featured various neighborhood organizations and community groups in its

surrounding area, the neighborhoods surrounding Flint Park Lake employed less formal, word-of-mouth exchanges and community interactions. Due to Flint's political climate at the time with the appointment of an emergency financial manager, the Citizens District Council for Flint Park Lake had been disbanded and left powerless. Still, former members of the group continue to reside in and work towards improving this part of the City, and represent the strong will and determination of residents who have endured much yet strive for an improved quality of life in their neighborhoods. These individuals were active and engaged with the project team.

Similar to advertising for the Thread Lake community events, the project team relied heavily on door-to-door distribution of invitation cards and word-of-mouth communication between community liaisons and residents to promote the public visioning session. Invitation cards were also left with a few key local business owners to pass out to their customers that resided in the area. With limited formal stakeholder organizations and representatives in the study area, promotions were scaled down more to a neighborhood level and did not feature email, newsletter, or radio communications. Many in the neighborhood did not have computers or email access.

Visioning Session

The project team hosted a visioning session for residents of the Flint Park Lake community at the New McCree Theatre on November 14, 2013. Submarine sandwiches and salad were served with chips and beverages for dinner as a mixer leading into the meeting's agenda that allowed the team to get more acquainted with the residents in attendance. A brief presentation by the project coordinator described to the audience the project goals and organizations involved, and discussed the past efforts and current conditions around Flint Park Lake. The presenter also asked through a show of hands specific questions that gave the project team a better sense of its audience makeup and values, such as:

- How many have lived in Flint for 50 or more years? 30?
- How many have lived within 1 mile of Flint Park Lake for 30 or more years?
- How many have gone fishing in the lake? Swimming? Picnicked around the lake?
- How many are currently engaged in active clean-up efforts around the lake?

The lack of implementation of the 2002 Redevelopment Plan remains a sensitive subject to local residents who have grown dissatisfied and frustrated through the years at the lack of action on behalf of the City. Despite the long passage of time, such history creates distrust, volatile relationships and community concerns that must be taken into account and addressed in current initiatives. The presenter gave the audience a chance to voice concerns and share opinions on these past problems. Without learning first-hand accounts from local residents of these past struggles and soured relationships, the incoming project team could not hope to establish a credible relationship that builds forward momentum towards community growth and development.

Photo 8: Small groups shared their vision for future land uses and opportunities around Flint Park Lake.

Source: MSU-PZC

Similar facilitation exercises were employed at this visioning session that were used previously for the Thread Lake community *(Photo 8)*. Within small groups, residents were asked to picture the types of land uses, recreational amenities, and housing types they hope to see in 10 years, and the types of groups or individuals who would be responsible for these developments and proper maintenance. Group members then voted collectively on the most-liked suggestions and solutions, and these results were shared with the group as a whole to spark further commentary. The residents' ideas and suggestions were recorded on large white boards at each table and used along with notes taken throughout the visioning session to subsequently form action steps and objectives for the ensuing vision document.

Post-Engagement Procedures

After creating the draft vision document and applying the feedback received from the City of Flint planning department, the project team scheduled a follow-up meeting with the community to share the current draft with them and gain further input on the draft document. A vision presentation was scheduled at the New McCree Theatre on March 18, 2014, with a pizza and salad dinner being served to participants at the beginning of the event. The team detailed the project steps leading up to that point before breaking down the components of the vision document and sharing some of the images found within (*Figure 10)*. Residents walked through the proposed 31 action steps within the document and added their insight and opinions to certain goals and objectives as the presentation progressed.

This group was smaller in attendance, more integrated and acquainted with one another, and more weary of the planning process than those communities engaged around Thread Lake. Therefore the format of this vision presentation became much more open-ended and assumed a community forum atmosphere, where residents exchanged insights, opinions, and at times heated debates about the past planning efforts and future endeavors in the study area. While the dialogue at times may have appeared to be hostile, angry, and filled with fatigue over the planning process, the facilitator let the discussion carry on and pass from one resident to the next. The project team recognized the opportunity to receive genuine, passionate feedback from an engaged group of community members who have the most at stake. At such times

discussion must be monitored and facilitated within the course of a meeting agenda, but in this case the open discourse was encouraged and gave way to further invaluable public input for the project team to learn from and build upon within the framework of the vision document.

Figure 10: Conceptual images were drafted by the project team to illustrate the 'before and after' changes and improvements that were suggested during the visioning session.

Source: MSU-PZC

Through this lively community meeting the project team was able to gain a better understanding of the local residents' hopes and desires for Flint Park Lake and the surrounding neighborhoods. More concrete action steps were suggested including a discussion of who should implement each action. With this fresh knowledge in hand, the project team went back to the vision draft and incorporated the sentiments expressed by the public, including adding an additional section that detailed the community's wish to start small with practical, focused improvements that have an immediate impact on the neighborhood level. The team then further corresponded with the City of Flint planning department to discuss these additions to the vision document along with other final edits suggested by their office to better align with the master plan. The final draft of the vision document was then posted on the project team's websites and distributed to community liaisons in the study area as well as the City.

The final document can be viewed or downloaded at:
http://www.landpolicy.msu.edu/modules.php?name=Documents&op=viewlive&sp_id=2597

Similarities and Differences in the Two Communities

The neighborhoods around Thread Lake and Flint Park Lake face similar challenges, but are drastically different in terms of their histories and organizational networks. These differences guided and influenced the techniques applied in each community.

Similarities Between Thread and Flint Park Lake

Both communities have many residents that are similar in terms of racial makeup and socioeconomic status, and each displayed understanding and awareness of governmental processes. Both communities have experienced significant population loss and the resulting blight caused by the loss in employment income. *Table 1* summarizes the similarities between the communities surrounding Thread and Flint Park Lake.

Table 1: Similarities between the Communities Surrounding Thread and Flint Park Lake in Flint, MI		
	Thread Lake	**Flint Park Lake**
Planning	- Near corridors in the new Flint Master Plan which prioritizes them equally and will result in future sub-area plans for the communities.	
Connectivity	- Gateways to prominent suburbs. Flint Township lies to the west of Flint Park Lake on Pierson Road, and Grand Blanc to the south of Thread Lake on S. Saginaw Road. - Easy access to Interstate-475, Interstate-75	

Differences Between Thread and Flint Park Lake

In contrast to the similarities, the two communities are different in terms of geography, organization, and investment by nearby stakeholders. *Table 2* summarizes some of the differences between the two communities. Each of these differences were accounted for during the engagement process and techniques were adapted to fit each community.

Table 2: Differences between the Communities Surrounding Thread and Flint Park Lake in Flint, MI		
	Thread Lake	**Flint Park Lake**
Organization	- Three established neighborhood organizations	- Informal neighborhood networks reliant on keystone community leaders
Partnerships	- Corporate and commercial support from surrounding businesses and public institutions	- Lack large-scale corporate and commercial support
Leadership	- Racially diverse leadership group with ties to anchor institutions	- Primarily African-American leadership
Trust	- Belief in local, county, and state authorities to assist with redevelopment and organization process	- Prefer autonomous, resident-driven organization and redevelopment initiatives - Distrust of city authorities
Anchor Institutions	- Close proximity to anchor institutions and downtown Flint	- Distant from downtown Flint and anchor institutions in the City

Except for geography, the differences between the communities are a result of past histories, experiences, community development and organization and require further explanation.

Organization: Thread Lake is surrounded by three distinct neighborhood organizations – South Parks Neighborhood Association (north side of lake), South Side Business and Resident Association (west) and Circle Drive Neighborhood Association (south). These organizations are formal networks with identified leaders, a regular meeting schedule, and networking capacity. These organizations have previously driven planning efforts in their respective neighborhoods and have engaged in day-to-day capacity building with residents and businesses. The neighborhoods surrounding Flint Park Lake do not have formal organizations or neighborhood groups. Rather, there are keystone members of the community that have formed informal networks and partnerships with residents. The keystone community members can facilitate engagement with other residents and businesses.

Partnerships: The communities surrounding Thread Lake have partnered with nearby businesses and churches to complement their efforts. The South Saginaw Task Force (SSTF) is a group of business owners, residents, and stakeholders in the South Saginaw Corridor and surrounding neighborhoods that have collaborated to prepare an action agenda for improvement of the South Saginaw Corridor and the surrounding neighborhood. The task force is led by Diplomat Pharmacy, a large corporate specialty pharmacy, and includes area businesses, representatives from the local charter school International Academy of Flint *(Photo 9)*, area churches, local business networks, non-profits, and the City of Flint. The Flint Park Lake community lacks large-scale corporate and enterprise support and formal partnerships between residents and stakeholders. Flint Park Lake has representatives from local churches and businesses in their informal networks, but those organizations and businesses are

Photo 9: The project team partnered with the International Academy of Flint in the Thread Lake community.

Source: MSU-PZC

not helping to lead the neighborhood redevelopment process as is the case in the Thread Lake community.

Leadership: The leadership and membership in the Thread Lake community is racially and socio-economically diverse while the Flint Park Lake community stakeholders are primarily African-American. There are differing degrees of cooperation and willingness to partner across racial lines in the two communities - a challenge that stems from unique and divergent community histories.

Trust: There is a greater willingness to engage and work with local and county governments, businesses owners, and other area stakeholders in the Thread Lake community than in the neighborhoods surrounding Flint Park Lake. The Thread Lake community has a top-down approach to neighborhood development as the leaders in the area are driving efforts to plan, organize, and transform the neighborhoods. There a big challenge is getting all three neighborhood groups to regularly communicate and work together since the lake which could unite them actually separates them by its odd shape. In Flint Park Lake, there's a mistrust of governmental and corporate authority as well as suspicions towards outside organizations planning for its neighborhoods. The mistrust of authority and partnerships in the Flint Park Lake community stems from local government's past failures to implement an adopted plan for the neighborhoods. Previous planning processes raised expectations, especially when money was secured for implementation but then not spent there. The lack of action resulted in mistrust and frustration towards authority and the current isolationist sentiments in the community. Despite that, neighborhood leaders remain optimistic about their own ability to lead implementation of the consensus vision using neighborhood volunteers.

Anchor Institutions: The Thread Lake neighborhoods are located in close proximity to downtown Flint and other anchor institutions in the form of large-scale businesses, a charter school, and two universities. These anchor institutions make up the partnerships and organizational networks that are attempting to redevelop the S. Saginaw Corridor and the neighborhoods to the west of Thread Lake. In contrast, Flint Park Lake is surrounded by low-usage commercial structures and lacks anchor institutions that can assist in providing jobs and assisting with neighborhood stabilization and redevelopment.

The differences between the two communities is stark, and deeply-rooted in the respective histories and activities surrounding both lakes. Each of the communities provided unique challenges that altered engagement strategies. However, both communities are under-served, largely low-income neighborhoods which is a similarity that guided the engagement process.

PLANNING FOR URBAN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:
What was learned that may be of value elsewhere

Community engagement is a continuous process that relies on constant feedback from participants to drive the process further *(Figure 11).* A plan resulting from engagement is a representation of the residents' vision for their community and often takes multiple events to achieve.
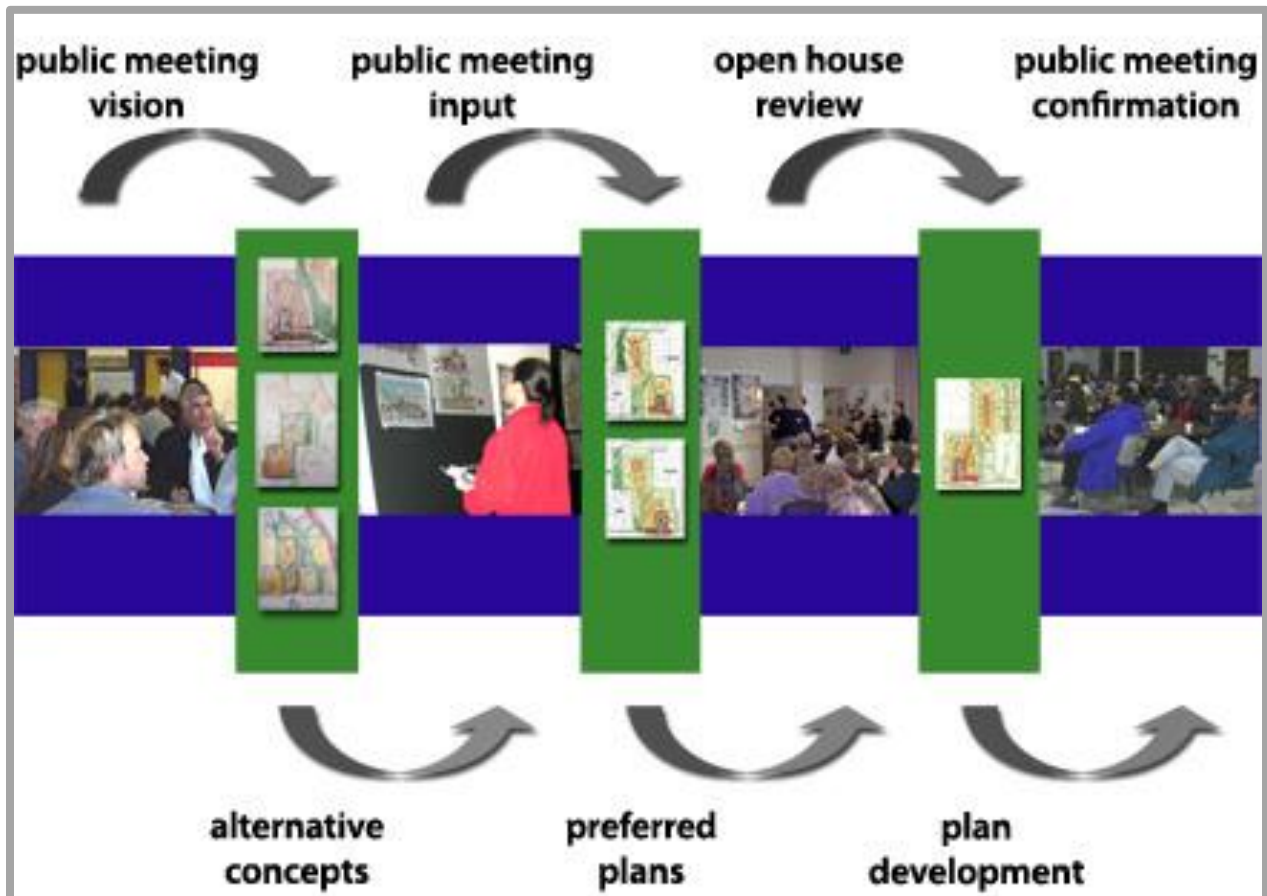
Figure 11: This illustration displays the process used in a charrette to gather feedback. There are opportunities after each planning and design session for community input. Community engagement processes need feedback loops to ensure that everyone remains on track with process grab and with outcomes.

Source: National Charrette Institute

Based on this project's community engagement efforts in Thread and Flint Park Lake, below is a guide outlining key steps, strategies, activities, and questions to consider during other community engagement processes along with examples from this project in Flint, MI. These steps are focused on engaging under-served populations around water quality issues.

Background Research

The initial step of community engagement involves building a foundation of knowledge about the community study area and learning as much as possible about its history and development. Historical analysis and background research should include an examination of the city's master plan and zoning ordinance, neighborhood plans and newsletters, press clippings and news postings, and other relevant data that provides an historic context to the community. The research team should evaluate past plans and related documents in order to become familiar with past and current planning and engagement efforts in the study area. The community has likely participated in some form of engagement in the past, and it is crucial to learn about the results of such endeavors and not duplicate these same efforts. Duplication may lead to mistrust and disenfranchisement with the engagement process amongst local residents. In this sense, the initial background research must be comprehensive in order to ensure a thorough knowledge of the study area, which will help build trust during future interactions with residents and stakeholders. Displaying a lack of knowledge about the community can quickly lead to the research team losing integrity and authority of the subject matter early in the planning process. The reverse is also true, demonstrating a knowledge of past efforts and a willingness to build on them helps to build trust going forward.

Beyond the historical context, there's also a *social* and *cultural* aspect to each community that the research team must properly assess and interpret. This knowledge is vital in crafting a planning process that meets the task at hand and aligns with the spirit and identity of the community and its residents.

Social – Each community contains either formal or informal keystone community leaders that can serve as resources for historical information and provide access to other social networks in the area. These community leaders need to be discovered prior to the neighborhood engagement process. Leaders in the community can be involved in local schools, churches, businesses, neighborhood organizations, or civil service. A key component of searching for community leaders is determining which individuals and institutions the community trusts and respects the most.

Cultural – The culture of a community ties into its demographic background, housing conditions, languages spoken, educational attainment, religious affiliations, and historical development. The cultural aspects of a community also extend beyond these elements into the realm of interpersonal relationships involving multiple stakeholder groups and networks. Existing cultural bonds and the related social networks that have been cultivated over time should be embraced by the research team to ensure all members of the community have a chance to participate in an inclusive planning process.

During the course of this background research, a community profile should be developed that documents these historical, social, and cultural dynamics found in the study area. This profile should attempt to assess the following characteristics of the community:

- Basic geographic and demographic features, political boundaries, and landmarks
- Major active organizations and the services they provide
- Key community functions and where they occur
- Influential persons, respected leaders, keepers of local history
- Primary methods of communication, exchange of information
- Barriers that prevent improvement/protection efforts or that have sidetracked past efforts
- Awareness, attitudes, and perceptions regarding the current planning project

To elaborate upon these elements, a step-by-step guide is presented below that identifies necessary components of conducting background research in preparation for targeted community engagement.

1) **Demographics:** Assessing the demographics of a study area helps create a snapshot in time of the residential make-up, housing trends, and social and physical characteristics of a neighborhood and community. When utilizing census data along with public records of the related city, state, or municipality, the research team should focus their community research to address the following questions:

    a. What are the key population demographics (age, household size, poverty, race, density)?
    b. Where do people live, work, and congregate?
    c. What are their physical living conditions (housing, urban, rural)?
    d. What language(s) are spoken?
    e. What are the levels of educational attainment?

These basic demographic questions provide an early foundation and ensure research moving forward aligns with the characteristics found within the study area. Without this fundamental knowledge the research team would be working blind and limited in their means to develop the proper strategies and techniques that match the local identity.

A related and important issue involves determining the geographic boundaries of the data sets and how they correspond to the geography of the study area. It is important to continually check with local people about perceived boundaries and whether they are more fluid and fixed (like a freeway or a river) or whether they are more fluid like the "edge" of many neighborhoods which often overlap.

2) ***Related Plans and Reports:*** Beyond basic community demographic research, the team should next evaluate any local, regional, and statewide plans or reports addressing the study area. These documents provide further information on studies previously undertaken within the community and the valuable lessons learned. They can involve planning, engineering, biological, and geographic data that adds to the base of research and provide a backdrop to the project study area. Existing related plans or reports that may be available for reference include:

> *In 2002, a Citizens District Council created a plan for the Flint Park Lake community that included water quality improvements. The project team marketed their efforts as an update to that plan. At Thread Lake, the project team compiled individual neighborhood plans created by the communities around the lake, and aimed to build upon those documents by incorporating water quality.*

- City master plan and zoning ordinance
- City parks and recreation plan
- County master plan
- County parks and recreation plan
- Neighborhood plans and other reports created by local organizations
- Past and current academic research projects
- Scientific reports on ecology, wildlife, geography, EPA water quality testing, DNR habitat research, etc.

Many of these documents were created with some level of community engagement and public participation, and may provide a reference on which techniques were utilized previously and their level of success in the study area. The research team should review these documents to recognize any missteps in previous efforts and strive to properly adapt their methods to avoid the same mistakes. Any opportunity to learn from these past initiatives provides a means to gain footing on the current project without wasting time on steps that were previously proven unwelcome or ineffective. These documents also provide invaluable insight into the community's goals and desires that were expressed on previous occasions and how these may have evolved over time.

3) ***Key Community Leaders and Stakeholders:*** As part of this initial research, the research team must also identify key individuals who command respect and authority within the project study area. These members of the community play a vital role in the engagement process, as they are the gatekeepers to the community and serve as liaisons between the research team and local residents. Without the assistance of these key figures, the team would simply be seen as outsiders with limited credibility. The team should search for key community stakeholders and leaders by considering the following questions:

a. Which city council member(s) represents the area?
b. Which planning commissioner(s) represents the area?
c. What governmental service organizations work regularly with local leaders like the local planning, community, or economic development department?
d. Which faith-based organizations are active in the community? Which Pastors are prominent or have been around awhile?
e. What prominent local businesses are in the area? Business networks? Chambers of Commerce?
f. Which schools and educational institutions do youth attend?
g. Who are the health care providers?
h. Are there formal or informal neighborhood organizations or networks?
i. Which area non-profit organizations are active? What type of mission and goals do they have for the community?

These key community leaders and stakeholders may range from elected officials and block group presidents to long-term local business owners and senior residents who have spent the majority of their lives within the community. Regardless of their formal position in society, these individuals represent perhaps the most important aspect of the project's initial research stage. For without first properly identifying and building some level of familiarity, if not a formal relationships with these key figures in the community, the research team would face an uphill battle when introducing themselves and promoting their mission to a weary disinterested public. These community liaisons smooth the team's introduction to the target audience and help plant the seeds for initial relationships that expand into more intensive planning engagements through the course of the project.

4) ***Key Assets and Natural Resources:*** As a final component to the team's initial research, an inventory should be created of any natural resources and key assets located in and around the project study area. This list may include natural amenities and geographic features, or more place-based community assets that are unique to the locale. Historic sites and structures, local cultural traditions, or native wildlife and vegetation all represent the types of existing assets that give a community its own identity and set it apart as a unique destination. The team should research these assets specific to the community while also assessing any natural resources located in and around the study area such as:

- Rivers, lakes, and streams;
- Forests, woodlands, wetlands, and natural areas that are or should be preserved;
- Trail systems and pathway connectivity; and
- City and county park systems, park facilities, and recreational amenities.

By examining the natural amenities and other unique assets of the study area, the research team can obtain a better understanding of where to focus their planning initiatives, and more importantly how to capitalize on the innovation and creativity already active in the community. These existing assets and efforts represent the

The project team prepared one-page summaries of background information for both Thread Lake and Flint Park Lake that were used as research foundations and conversation starters at the community engagement events.

possibilities for growth and development in the community and form the building blocks which the research team may use to spur further enthusiasm and investment in the planning project.

These steps combine to create a suggested track for conducting initial background research on a community before beginning serious public engagement. The activity of developing the whole contextual picture helps researchers more genuinely understand the study area and become more effective at helping residents and stakeholders achieve their goal through the public engagement process. It also enlightens the team on the appropriate ways to engage them. While each community features its own unique history and identity that may require additional case-specific research, the breakdown above attempts to emphasize the fundamental components of thorough, comprehensive pre-engagement research.

Planning for Engagement

Planning for engagement involves the following components: *pre-event planning*, *facilitating engagement*, and *post-engagement procedures*. Each of these components is vital for the overall process and must be completed sequentially to ensure optimal results from engagement. Below is a detailed outline of each engagement step and the corresponding desired outcomes.

Pre-Event Planning

Before hosting an engagement event, it's essential to continue building trust with individuals and groups. Trust is constructed by physically engaging with residents within the existing community infrastructure. As a facilitator who potentially resides and works outside the community, the following steps are crucial to invest in the community and then cater your engagement efforts based on the needs and demographics of the community.

1) *Meet individually with key identified stakeholders and community leaders* – It is more difficult to build trust with a community as an outsider or as part of a larger institution. Trust must be carefully developed through individual consultation, developed knowledge of the community, and a willingness to listen and learn from existing conditions and efforts. In each meeting, the goals, process, and outcomes of the project should be clearly and transparently defined and outlined. It's important to establish realistic expectations about

the results of engagement and the project overall. Promises that cannot be kept should not be made. Other elements of transparency that should be discussed in this meeting include:

- How many engagement events are needed
- Optimal dates/time to host the events
- Individuals and stakeholders that should be personally invited
- Other individuals to meet with prior to stakeholder engagement events

Stakeholders should be recruited individually with phone calls followed by written communications via email or mail. Communication with each individual stakeholder should emphasize the need for and importance of their involvement, expected time commitment or effort, and anticipated outcomes.

It's important to consider that stakeholders may potentially be occupied with full-time professional and personal commitments and therefore be hesitant to commit to another project. One should expect resistance from the stakeholders and plan accordingly by devising clear and concise talking points, and roles and responsibilities before engaging potential stakeholders. The research team must establish expectations for each stakeholder's responsibilities and duties, the corresponding time commitment, the positive results from their involvement and most importantly, why it is important for them to be involved and how their skillset will contribute to the project. Researchers must intellectually and emotionally invest stakeholders in the project by valuing their time, knowledge, and contributions. This can be accomplished by incorporating and endorsing their ideas into the project, offering exclusive information about the research, public appreciation, and constant communication.

2) *Attend existing networking and stakeholder meetings in the community* – Another element of building trust is being present and visible in the community on initiatives and objectives related to, but not directly corresponding to the project and engagement activities.

Attending existing stakeholder meetings enhances one's own awareness and knowledge of the study area while establishing a presence in the community. This process also potentially introduces the research team to other researchers, stakeholders, and public officials invested in the study area.

> *In both the Thread and Flint Park Lake neighborhoods, the project team attended Flint Master Plan workshops prior to conducting engagement activities.*

Participating in existing meetings is more impactful if you are invited by or are a guest of a stakeholder in the existing network. Endorsements from local stakeholders can provide the research team with authority and provide a bridge of trust between the community and the project.

Attending existing meetings is also an opportunity to gather knowledge while making valuable connections by networking before and after the meeting. The first priority of attendance is to understand and gain context of the current challenges and opportunities in the community. The knowledge and data-gained should be internally documented and attempts should be made to incorporate those challenges in the project if there is a natural complement.

3) *Create a committee of core neighborhood leaders/stakeholders* – After meeting with local stakeholders and community members, it is beneficial to either formally or informally establish a core group or committee that will be consulted throughout the engagement portion of the project. If a formal committee is established, it might be necessary to build a Stakeholder Operating Plan that addresses the following issues:

   i. Engagement goals
   ii. Ground rules and expectations for communication and processes
   iii. Roles, responsibilities and decision-making methods
   iv. Stakeholder goals, objectives and tasks to achieve the goals
   v. Products and final results from the stakeholder program

These elements will differ depending on the makeup and size of the stakeholder group or committee. However, for the purposes of engagement, a common and desired outcome of a stakeholder committee is to increase participation and community input. Community leaders are a bridge between the research team and local residents/stakeholders.

4) *Develop a marketing and communications strategy for outreach and engagement* – The goal of a marketing and communications plan is to inform the community about the project, provide updates on the progress of the research, and consistently engage the community. Communication needs to be designed based on the technological strengths of a community. Online, mobile, and print marketing and communications should all be considered for the purposes of spreading the message about the project and upcoming events. Additionally, continual online engagement between events should be considered and prioritized in order to foster an ongoing conversation. Be sure to match the tool with the audience. Older audiences and poorer ones have less computer knowledge and access to online communication. The reverse is also true. Younger and wealthier audiences have more access to these tools. Unfortunately, the less your target audience has internet access, the more expensive communication is, especially if printed and mailed materials are involved. The following tools and strategies should be considered and included in the marketing and communications plan.

   Website – Activities, upcoming events, and products related to the project and engagement effort should be prominently displayed on the websites of all partner and stakeholder organizations. The web addresses of the site where project and engagement information is listed should be customized to be short and easy to

remember so it can be displayed and easily accessed from print materials. The website content should be updated regularly and preferably contain a comments sections for regular discourse and feedback. These comments should be moderated, analyzed, and included as input as community engagement throughout the process.

Social Media – Facebook and Twitter are the two primary social outlets that can be powerful tools for continuous engagement with stakeholders and residents. Organizations who use those mediums should be encouraged to continuously communicate about the project. Cross-referencing those organizations will amplify the message online and ensure continual engagement between larger in-person events. A hashtag (#XXXXXXX) should be established early in the project as a means to organize and document all social media communication.

Neighborhood Newsletters/ Email Listservs – Written communications should be provided to neighborhood leaders and stakeholders to include in their newsletters, publications and email listervs. The communications provided to leaders needs to be short, concise and include enticing images that attract residents to engagement events. Being profiled in the local publications and online messaging provides authority to your message as it comes from organizations with established brands and relationships in the community.

Mail/Door to Door Distribution – If stakeholders are willing to share existing lists that contain mailing addresses of their constituents, it's helpful to send physical printed materials to all residents and businesses in the area *(Figure 12)*. This will ensure that the events are promoted to constituents who are not connected to the digital world and reinforce those who may have first seen your message online. If a mailing list is not available, it might be effective to distribute materials to residents and businesses door-to-door. This activity should be completed in pairs or in a small group for safety reasons and only be considered if vetted and approved by local leaders. If the research team engages in door-to-door distribution, they should prepare a brief summary of the project that they can orally share with stakeholders during interactions. They should also be prepared for pushback from the residents who may have participated in similar efforts before with results that were inconsistent with their desires and perceptions. The research team must be patient and transparent about the purposes of their project without further aggravating stakeholders or attempting to console them for past ills and/or misconceptions.

Figure 12: Example of a mailing flyer and "Save the Date" used for door-to-door distribution.

Source: MSU-PZC

Local Media Outreach – Announcements in local print, TV, radio and online media should be considered depending on the target audience for the event. If engagement is only desired from stakeholders within specific geographic boundaries that correlate with the research study area, then general announcement in media outlets might be a hindrance as they attract participants not related to the project. The external communications strategy is dependent on the level of engagement desired in the project.

5) <u>Host a pre-engagement mixer</u> – The purpose of a pre-engagement event is to connect the research team with residents and stakeholders of the community that will be engaged for feedback and input on the project. A pre-engagement event is an opportunity for informal networking, individual introductions, and to enhance communication between the research team and stakeholders. The desired outcome of a pre-engagement event is to increase trust between stakeholders and the research team. This event, and all future engagement events, should be mindful of providing engaging activities for children as well as food and refreshments in order to make the event more accessible to residents. Both indoor and outdoor activities for children should be provided (*Photo 10, 11*). If the timing of the event overlaps with meal times, then a meal should be provided otherwise, snacks and refreshments should suffice. Additionally, the timing of this event should not conflict with

general work times and therefore should be hosted on the evening and/or weekend in order to maximize participation. The research team should consult and rely on local stakeholders for an appropriate date and time in order to take advantage of their knowledge of and experience in working in the community.

Photo 10 & 11: A moon bounce house, ice cream dessert bar, and coloring activities were employed at a community gathering on Thread Lake in Flint to encourage families to participate.

Source: MSU-PZC

6) <u>*Plan for a productive engagement meeting*</u> – The engagement meeting is the primary tool by which you can educate and gain feedback from your target population and must therefore be planned for meticulously in advance. The first decision that needs to be made involves determining how many engagement meetings will be necessary in order to complete the project goals and reflect the intent of the community. This will allow participants to have clear expectations about the engagement process and plan accordingly on their end. It also shows organization from the research team. There are four major principles for effective meetings:

   i. ***Provide advance notice to participants*** – Participants should be informed about an upcoming meeting a minimum of 3-4 weeks in advance. A "hold the date" announcement for large events should be at least 6-8 weeks in advance. This displays respect for their time, reinforces your organization, and increases the chance of attendance. This also provides stakeholders with time to review documents and/or further familiarize themselves with the study area or topic matter. Respectful reminder notices are also helpful to send out a week or two before the scheduled event.

ii. **Develop a strong agenda** – A strong agenda is clearly outlined, concise, organized with timeslots for each item and is provided with input from the key stakeholders in advance of the meeting. The agenda should acknowledge and recognize all local stakeholders collaborating on the project and address the following questions:

- Why are you calling a meeting?
- What do you hope to accomplish?
- Who needs to attend and what are their roles?
- What topics need to be discussed to reach the desired outcome?
- What are room layout arrangements?

Beyond taking these questions into consideration, the agenda should also include time for discussion and audience introductions and questions.

iii. **Manage the process during the meeting** –
Strategies and tactics to manage the meeting and process will be discussed in more detail in the next section (*"Facilitating Engagement"*). It is important to consider all possibilities that might result from a meeting and then devise a plan to address potential issues and concerns accordingly *(Figure 13).* The facilitator of the meeting must be extremely knowledgeable about the study area, calm, rehearsed and poised to handle potentially challenging situations. The facilitator must also be prepared to be humble if there are situations when he/she is unaware of information being considered. Specific strategies to prepare for challenges related to facilitation and meetings will be provided in the following section. If an important question comes up that the facilitator and accompanying partners cannot answer, be sure to get the contact information of the person asking the question, then get an answer quickly and provide it to them as soon as possible. In some case the question is so important it should be listed with other FAQ's on the project website. Let other key stakeholder leaders know if you do this.

Visioning exercise

An excellent way to begin the stakeholder process is to conduct a visioning exercise, in which public agency representatives, stakeholders and other interested parties brainstorm on how the resource should look and function 10 or 20 years from now. Although vision statements are necessarily broad and lack detail, they are usually agreeable to nearly all participants and thus serve as an important touchstone later in the process, when discussions over devilish details require the perspective of a consensual "big picture."
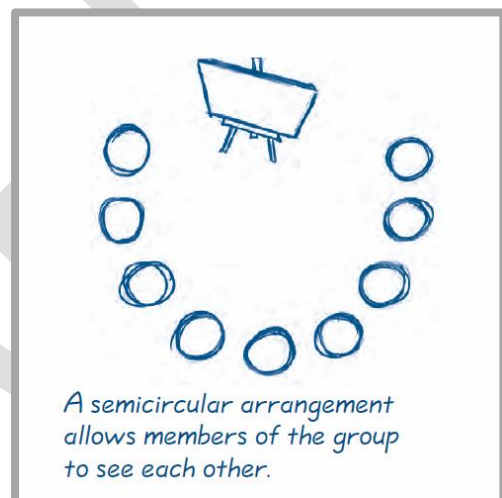

Figure 13: A visioning exercise can be used to kick-off a meeting.

Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Getting in Step: Engaging Stakeholders in Your Watershed

iv. **Follow through** – It is crucial to summarize the results of a meeting at the end and clearly layout follow-ups and next steps that resulted from the meeting. Post-engagement techniques will be discussed in detail in the section beginning on **p. 51**. All follow-ups from the meeting should be prompt and orderly while content is still fresh. It may be appropriate to distribute meeting minutes or a summary after the meeting as well. Depending on the degree of agreed upon involvement and commitment from the formal or informal local stakeholder committee, a follow-up meeting with local stakeholders might be necessary to recap the meeting and devise a strategy to move forward. Important meetings should have a short survey form provided to everyone present. Tabulate these immediately to ensure everything remains on track and fix any identified problems promptly.

7) *Select appropriate venue* – The engagement venue should be familiar and local to the study area, and in close proximity to the majority of residents and stakeholders that are targeted for engagement. If multiple engagement events are planned, the same venue should be targeted for all events in order to build familiarity amongst stakeholders. The venue should also be free of physical barriers in order to accommodate individuals with physical disabilities. Ideally, the site is also located in close proximity to public transportation and is walkable for local stakeholders. Easy access to the venue increases the chance of attendance at the event. Once the venue is selected, the seating arrangement for the presentation should be conducive to collecting feedback and encourages brainstorming. A

A semicircular arrangement allows members of the group to see each other.

Figure 14: The seating arrangement should encourage discussion.

Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Getting in Step: Engaging Stakeholders in Your Watershed

semicircle or U-shaped arrangement is ideal for small groups because it allows each individual to make eye contact with everyone else *(Figure 14).* Large groups should be seated around tables (round preferably) so that input can be obtained in small groups. The exact arrangement will depend on the size of the room and audience.

8) *Provide healthy food and beverages* – Regardless of the time and length of the meeting, it is important to provide food and beverages to the participants of the event. If the time of the event overlaps with general meal times, then a meal should be provided. Snacks and meals also provide an opportunity for informal networking and engagement in addition to making the engagement event more attractive. Food and beverages should be advertised and marketed on all promotional materials leading up to the event.

Facilitating Engagement

The success of an engagement event depends on a myriad of factors that range from the facility, the facilitator and appropriate marketing and follow-up to the event. The engagement event should be informative, interactive and be citizen-focused. Meticulous planning is required to ensure all aspects of the event drive engagement and feedback from the constituents. The comfort of the physical space, knowledge level of the facilitator, and effective interactions are all vital for successful engagement activities. Below are detailed steps and components that must be considered for the engagement presentation.

1) *Facilitator preparations* – In addition to being equipped with the background knowledge and history of the community, the facilitator must be prepared for multiple scenarios during engagement. The facilitator must adopt a mindset that is flexible and adaptable yet willing to be task-oriented depending on which direction the presentation goes. Engagement activities may produce conflicts as residents can use the forum and audience to vent about past successes, failures and/or injustices by other institutions. The tone of audience participation may become overwhelmingly negative and cynical *(Figure 15)* which will deter the goals and desired outcomes from the engagement process.

Dealing with negative people

One of the challenges watershed programs face in developing a collaborative and open environment is dealing with negative people. This becomes an even larger issue in meetings. The following tips can help the leader and the group deal effectively with people who might become disillusioned or dissatisfied with group progress or otherwise create impediments to reaching consensus and implementing selected water quality improvement strategies:

- Make sure participants have a vested interest in the meeting topic and understand their role. They are more likely to be active and cooperative.

- To set expectations at the appropriate level, communicate the scope of the meeting clearly.

- Establish the process to be followed at the beginning of the meeting and stick with it.

- Model a positive and receptive attitude, whether you're the facilitator, meeting leader or participant.

- Address objections or concerns directly and involve the group in dealing with them.

- Seek to understand all participant points of view by asking probing questions such as "How do you see this problem? What do you think is happening? How is the situation affecting your group?"

Source: Interaction Associates.

Figure 15: The facilitator of the engagement activity needs to prepare for dealing with people that might be negative about the process and possible outcomes.

Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Getting in Step: Engaging Stakeholders in Your Watershed

The facilitator must be equipped for all these scenarios during engagement. Proper preparation combined with appropriate experience, dynamic presentation skills, a concise methodology for conflict resolution and establishing clear expectations prior to the start of the engagement event will assist with overcoming these potential obstacles and scenarios.

2) *Account for different learning styles* – Different people have their own approaches to processing new information, acquiring knowledge, and providing feedback. Facilitators should strive to accommodate these various learning styles when engaging and communicating with the public, and assess how participants are responding to the exercises through the progression of the meeting. A variety of learning styles have been noted but typically involve these common elements:

   i.   **Visual –** Learning through pictures, images, spatial understanding

   ii. **Aural –** Learning through sound and music

   iii. **Verbal –** Learning through the use of words, in speech and writing

   iv. **Physical –** Learning through the use of hands, body, sense of touch

   v.   **Logical –** Learning through logic, reasoning, and systems

   vi. **Social –** Learning in groups or with other people, interpersonal

   vii. **Solitary –** Learning through self-study, working alone, intrapersonal
        (Advanogy.com. 2004. Learning-styles-online.com)

These various learning styles illustrate the range of ways that information may be exchanged during community engagement activities. To maximize the educational experience for participating residents and glean meaningful input into engagement processes, the research team should try to offer a range of activities among the learning styles. This may involve creating various exercises to communicate the goals and mission at hand and collect feedback, ensuring that all participants are able to understand and provide meaningful input.

3) *Community and facilitator introductions* – Unless the group is very large, the engagement presentation should begin with formal and individual introductions from each person in attendance. This is an opportunity for the facilitator and research team to formally introduce themselves, provide recognition to prominent stakeholder leaders who have assisted with the project to this point and learn about other attendees and the entities that they are representing.

4) *Survey participants* – Once introductions are complete, the facilitator should survey participants to determine where they are from, how long they have been living in the community and their overall vision for the neighborhood. This is an opportunity to gain context on the audience and obtain a preliminary overview of their commitment to the community and expectations for the project. The survey can be conducted orally asking a

series of questions and asking participants to raise their hands in response, or it could be a short written survey completed by each person after signing in and gathered up at an appropriate time.

5) *Past efforts and current conditions* – Before introducing the goals of the engagement activity, it is important to frame the history of the community and current conditions into a narrative that emotionally connects with the audience. The emotional attachment may arise from nostalgia with past images or potential visions for the future. An overview of the community history will also foster further trust between the research team and constituents as it indicates investment and research into the subject matter. The current conditions also illustrates a starting point for the project from which the research team hopes to build on with the help of citizens and stakeholders. Although it's important for the team to provide this context, it's also crucial to keep this part of the presentation concise so not to stir past emotions and provide opportunities for venting and discontent. The engagement activity must move the community forward while glancing at and acknowledging, but not relishing in the past.

6) *Interactively collect input* – The purpose of community engagement is to collect input from stakeholders and this input should be collected through creative interaction and activities. Engagement should both be fun and informative. Below are a few techniques that could be incorporated to your engagement activities as methods to effectively obtain feedback from participants.

   Games - Games can be a fun, effective, and unique activity to engage community members in planning decisions and there is an ever enlarging variety to them, including chip games and virtual games. In physical chip games, players use chips to represent attributes they envision in their community and place them on map. The attributes can be modified to serve environmental purposes as well. Citizens are often placed into small groups for games which encourage interaction. It is ideal for each small group to present to the larger group at the end of the game so everyone is aware of the different perspectives that were envisioned.

   Keypad Polling - Keypad polling is an electronic meeting support tool that allows users to respond to multiple-choice questions using a wireless keypad or cellphone with the right app installed. It can enhance training, decision making, and engagement. A question from the facilitator or a participant is posed on a screen with a series of

possible answers. Each participant equipped with a wireless keypad responds based on his/her knowledge and opinions. Responses are anonymous and instantly tallied, and are then displayed on screen *(Figure 16).* The process is transparent and immediate, and everyone can see the collective response to the question. Based on the response, the facilitator can change the direction of the meeting, or go into greater depth based on the level of understanding the group shows.
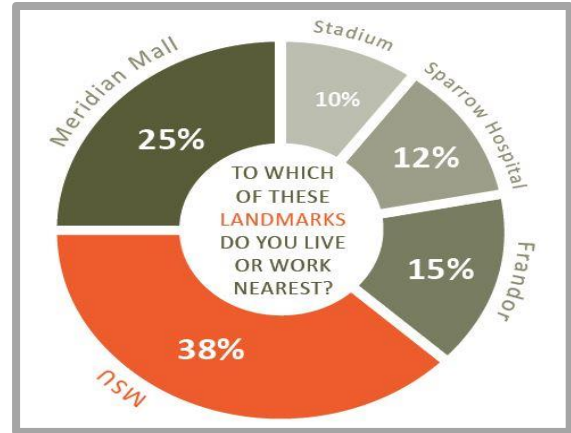

Figure 16: Example of results of keypad polling.

Source: Dover Kohl and Associates, under contract to the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission, reproduced by permission.

Small Group Discussion - A small group discussion is a facilitated discussion involving a small number of people (< 10) in a target group that is mediated by a skilled facilitator. The facilitators in this case should be members of the research team. It is their responsibility to document the results from every small group discussion *(Photo 12).* While it is difficult to project group opinions or data onto an entire community, this variability can be balanced by encouraging each group to present the results of their discussion to the larger group before moving to a next step of ending a meeting. Group

Photo 12: Facilitators should try to record all thoughts and ideas expressed by all participants at the table.

Source: MSU-PZC

dynamics play a critical role in a small group. Through dialogue and conversation, groups may discover issues that individuals (interviews or surveys) may not have considered.

Visioning - Visioning is a community engagement process that helps citizens to articulate or define the future they want for their neighborhood, corridor, or community. A visioning activity at an engagement event asks participants to visualize and imagine their ideals for the community in both the short and long term. Visioning consists of asking directed and open ended questions about the subject matter for which you wish to receive feedback. Visioning will provide information on the current perceptions of the community as well as outline ambitions for the future. Visioning can be done orally, in writing, or visually with maps and diagrams.

Asset & Challenges Mapping - Asset Mapping starts from a positive perspective, viewing a community as a place with assets to be enhanced, not deficits to be remedied. Assets may be persons, physical structures, natural resources, institutions, businesses, or organizations. The asset-based community development process involves the community in making an inventory of assets and capacity, building relationships, developing a vision of the future, and leveraging internal and external resources to support actions to achieve it. It involves documenting the tangible and intangible resources of a community. Asset mapping is done best visually by allowing residents to draw or label on maps of the study area *(Photo 13).* Challenges are the negative side but sometimes are inescapable, such as locations where people have safety concerns.
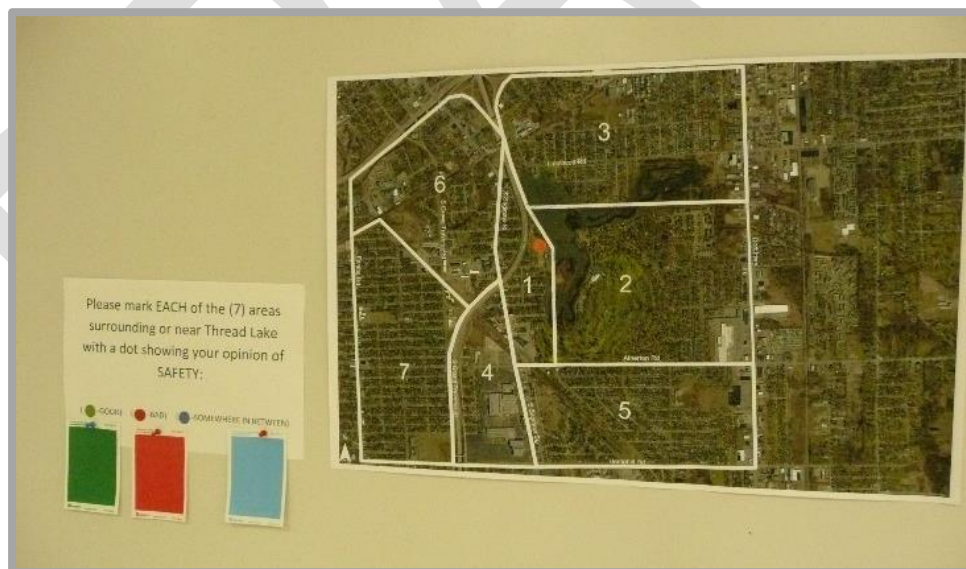
Photo 13: Asset & Challenges Mapping provides a visual representation of the geographic location of an asset or challenge facing a neighborhood or community.

Source: MSU-PZC

7) *Allow time for discussion and evaluation* – After the interactive component of the engagement presentation, time must be allotted for general group discussion on both the content material and the engagement process. Residents and stakeholders should be encouraged to openly discuss the content and add additional information that may have been missed earlier. This discussion should be complemented with a written evaluation about the engagement activity that measures the value and effectiveness of the event. The evaluation is based on surveys completed at the end of the program by participants. The evaluation should also have a content component that allows residents to individually and confidentially provide feedback. The last evaluation is a key component of community engagement because it's individual and personal. This evaluation is also crucial because it measures the perceived success of the process which allow for future modifications to engagement activities.

8) *Highlight next steps with a timeline* – The last part of an engagement activity is to outline a timeline of next steps that reflects the results from the engagement presentation. Participants should be made aware how their feedback will influence and direct the future of the project *(Figure 17).* If future engagement activities are planned, participants should be encouraged to attend and provided marketing materials that they can use to distribute to other participants. Participants should be informed where information associated with the just completed event will be posted as it becomes available (e.g. any PowerPoint presentations, evaluation results, handouts, FAQs, etc.).

Figure 17: Feedback from engagement activities should be incorporated in the final product.

Source: Detroit Future City

In addition to the timeline of future events and efforts, participants should be provided contact information to offer feedback and information between sessions. If there is digital space to provide feedback on a website or via social media, it should be emphasized and encouraged.

Post-Engagement Procedures

After the engagement event, the most important thing for the research team is to follow through with exactly what they indicated they would do prior to and during engagement. All follow-ups should be consistent with the timeline presented to stakeholders during the engagement event and reflect the values, outcomes and desires that were presented. Below are steps to take after the event to ensure community engagement and investment continues throughout the duration of the project.

1) *Maintain an active conversation online* – An online forum such as a website or social media should remain active after the engagement event in order to keep the conversation moving forward. The research team should instigate the conversation online either daily or weekly in order to prompt further discussions and comments. Continual engagement will maintain citizen investment in the project and provide real-time feedback and engagement based on current events occurring in the study area.

2) *Incorporate engagement results into the project and products* – All stakeholder feedback, in some form, should be incorporated into the final product after engagement. The stakeholders influence on the final product should be highlighted and recognizable in the document. It is important for stakeholders to see that their opinions and suggestions were valued and incorporated into the core of the product. This also ensures that the product accurately and truly reflects the desires of stakeholders and increases the probability of implementation as the next steps of the project are handed off from the research team to the community.

3) *Share update with core group of stakeholders* – Before the results of engagement and the final product are made public or distributed to the larger network in the study area, it is helpful to share the findings with the formal or informal network of stakeholders or committee that helped initiate engagement. This review of the results is sign of respect for the stakeholders who helped organize the engagement efforts and also provides a filter for the final product to ensure other stakeholders or residents won't be perturbed by the findings and results from engagement.

4) *Host final event for presentation* – A final presentation highlighting the findings of the research project should be marketed as a celebration of past efforts and kick-off to implementing the next steps of the project. A celebration of this kind once again brings stakeholders back in the same room together to enhance relationships between groups and encourage that all future visions for the area result from a rigorous and thorough engagement process that values the opinions and desires of each and every stakeholder and resident.

Postscript

Successful community engagement requires extensive preparation and dedication to learning as much as possible about the context of the study area and its residents long before actual engagement occurs. The principles of establishing relationships, building trust, and forming partnerships within the community create the foundation for an effective engagement process that produces valuable public input and sincere participation from local residents and stakeholders. Without these essential elements, the methods chosen for the actual engagement meeting and post-engagement procedures are of little consequence. For as the general project timeline illustrates to the right, the background research and pre-event planning stages comprise well over half of the overall engagement process for the research team. These initial stages play a key role in the success of the project, and as such demand that the appropriate time, resources, and planning are dedicated towards ensuring these steps are followed.

In the neighborhoods surrounding Thread Lake and Flint Park Lake, the detailed and passionate feedback received was used by the project team to create vision documents that help map potential steps towards improving the quality of life as it relates to recreation, neighborhood stabilization, targeted redevelopment, and improved water quality. The vision documents were passed to the appropriate community leaders as well as the City of Flint Planning Department to help guide future related efforts. Successful community gatherings were held in June and July, 2014 at both lakes to celebrate these efforts. They featured picnics, park clean-ups, fishing, and other activities for youth and adults. The events were designed to continue strengthening bonds within the community and encourage further participation and passion for improving neighborhoods and parks surrounding these lakes. Additionally, the City of Flint and Genesee County Park and Recreation Commission have entered into

START

Background research
- *Study community demographics, local plans, reports, news articles, and other resources to familiarize with study area*

- *Identify key assets, local leaders, opportunities for partnerships, and barriers to building relationships*

Pre-Event Planning
- *Interview key stakeholders/community leaders; attend local meetings;*
- *Create core committee to serve as liaisons between planners & residents;*
- *Devise marketing/outreach strategies*
- *Host pre-engagement mixer, develop plan for engagement meeting & agenda*

Facilitating Engagement
- *Host and facilitate community engagement meeting; apply techniques and content that match the audience in order to accomplish the project goals*

Post-Engagement Procedures
- *Share feedback received and incorporate into final product*
- *Host event to showcase results, celebrate community efforts*
- *Maintain active discussion to help determine next steps for community*

FINISH

an agreement that transfers responsibilities of park maintenance, security, and upkeep of four city parks to the county, including parks around Thread Lake and Flint Park Lake. With the completed vision documents, the neighborhoods, city, and county organizations now have guidance on the goals and desires of local residents that can provide a foundation for potential future improvements.

Resources

The following resources were used during the writing of this guidebook. These resources can provide further helpful knowledge and strategies related to community engagement around environmental issues in under-served populations.

Getting in Step: Engaging Stakeholders in Your Watershed. 2nd Edition
This comprehensive engagement guidebook was produced by the United States Environmental Protection Agency in May 2013 and addresses issues and strategies concerning engaging populations around a watershed. The document can be accessed at:
http://cfpub.epa.gov/npstbx/files/stakeholderguide.pdf

Growing Together for a Sustainable Future: Strategies and Best Practices for Engaging with Disadvantaged Communities on Issues of Sustainable Development and Regional Planning.
Jason Reece from The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at The Ohio State University produced this guidebook in April 2011. The guidebook offers strategies and processes for engaging with disadvantaged communities during regional planning.
The document can be accessed at:
http://www.kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/reports/2011/04_2011_Sustainability_CivicEngagement_Guide.pdf

From Public Health to Planning: Experiences Engaging Hard-to-Reach Populations in Washtenaw County.
Stephen Wade of the Washtenaw County Office of Community and Economic Development, Daniel Kruger from the University of Michigan and Charo Ledon, executive director of Casa Latina made this presentation at the October 2013 Michigan Association of Planning conference in Kalamazoo, Mich. The concepts of "Bonding, Bridging, and Linking" on page 11 of this guidebook were derived from this presentation.

The Above PAR Process. Planning for Place, Access & Redevelopment
The Michigan Chapter of the American Planning Association published this guidebook in October 2013 in partnership with the C.S. Mott Foundation and the Michigan State Housing Development Authority.
The document can be accessed at:
http://www.planningmi.org/downloads/place_access_and_redevelopment_guidebook_final.pdf

The Community Engagement Guide for Sustainable Communities
PolicyLink and the Kirwan Institute at The Ohio State University partnered to produce a guidebook that focuses on the community engagement process for the purpose of developing and building sustainable communities. The publication was produced in 2012 and includes research on building cultural competency and capacity building. The document can be accessed at:
http://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/COMMUNITYENGAGEMENTGUIDE_LY_FINAL%20%281%29.pdf